

Stanford–Leuphana Summer Academy on Humanities and Media 2020

Technologies of Bureaucracy: Before and After the Digital Turn

Media invariably have organizational effects: They shape the ordering of the social. Yet to become operative as media, they need to become part of institutional, organizational, managerial, or entrepreneurial contexts. While a very old story, this intimate relation between media and organization has been updated and exacerbated by the so-called »digital turn«. In organizations and in the socio-technical organization of economic, social, political and cultural life, what counts can increasingly (and literally) be digitally stored, distributed, replayed, augmented, and switched.

Contemporary debates around »social media« and the »digital economy«, »digital labor«, »platform capitalism«, »surveillance capitalism«, or »algorithmic governance« therefore tend to present a new organizational landscape that is conditioned by digital technologies. Similarly, popular debates on technology and organization are largely framed in terms of ahistorical and presentist notions of »innovation«, »disruption«, »flexibility«, and »post-bureaucracy«.

The second Stanford – Leuphana Summer Academy on Humanities and Media poses the question of how media technologies do the work of organization. In doing so, however, the Summer Academy seeks to take a step back from familiar terms and images of epochal change and radical newness. For instance, in addition to its supposedly novel powers of sociotechnical disruption, the computer can be understood in much more traditional terms: it can be seen as a fundamentally bureaucratic medium, its logics as primarily administrative ones. In Cornelia Vismann's words, »the computer implements the basic law of bureaucracy according to which administrative techniques are transferred from the state to the individual«.

To understand how »technologies of bureaucracy« have shaped organization before and after the digital turn, the Summer Academy specifically invites historical studies of the relation between media and organization, technology and bureaucracy. How do genealogies of media and organization allow us to understand the digital turn, its pasts, presents, and potential futures? What were the main institutional contexts, figures of thought, and thinkers that came to shape the organizational prehistory of »digital cultures«? What might inquiries into pre-modern or early modern entanglements of media technologies and social ordering teach us about the present condition? Are there other historical and non-western cultures of organizational technologies that allow us to understand the present, such as the long tradition of Chinese bureaucracy (and the way it might shape contemporary »social credit systems«), medieval and ecclesiastic European bureaucracies formed by specific material technologies of the codex or cartularies, or the administration of colonial empires and the vagaries of translation? How can we then decenter and rethink presentist and often hyperbolic notions of »social media«? Moreover, the Summer Academy invites »grounded« investigations of the very materialities and immaterialities that shape technological ordering before and after the normalization of digital technologies. What were, have been and are the specific, and specifically mediating, objects that determine the practices and effects of organization?

Date:

June 22 – 26, 2020

Location:

Stanford H.G. Will Center, Berlin, »Haus Cramer«, Pacelliallee 18, 14195 Berlin

Faculty and guest speakers:

Timon Beyes (Sociology of Organisation and Culture, Leuphana)
Wendy Chun (New Media, Vancouver)
Shane Denson (Film and Media Studies, Stanford)
Monika Dommann (History, Zurich)
Marisa Galvez (French, Italian, and German Studies, Stanford)
Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Comparative Literature, Stanford)
Robin Holt (Organization Studies, Copenhagen)
Karla Oeler (Film and Media Studies, Stanford)
Claus Pias (History and Epistemology of Media, Leuphana)
Hito Steyerl (Experimental Film and Video, Berlin)
Peter Stohschneider (Medieval Studies, Munich) tbc
Fred Turner (Communication, Stanford)

Application:

All applications must be submitted electronically in PDF format. Please submit your CV (1-2 pages) along with a 500-word abstract of your topic, and a short letter of intent explaining why you would like to attend this Summer Academy.

Please use the following naming convention for your application files: Lastname_CV.pdf, Lastname_Abstract.pdf, Lastname_Letter_of_Intent.pdf.

Please email your applications to timon.beyes@leuphana.de.

The deadline for applications for the summer school is February 15, 2020. All applicants will be informed about the selection of participants by end of February 2020. The working language of the Summer Academy will be English.

The organizers will cover travel (economy) and accommodation costs for the time of the summer school. No additional fees will be charged.

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Timon Beyes (timon.beyes@leuphana.de)

General information:

The Stanford-Leuphana Summer Academy addresses the intersection between individual humanities disciplines and studies of media and technology from historical, systematic, and methodological perspectives. As we live in a time when new technologies are emerging at an increasingly rapid pace, the Academy seeks to address vital questions about how different media can drive political and social change, but it also inquires into the assumptions and values that produce technological artifacts. Media studies and media theory intersect with various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences that treat the transmission of information, the formation of social networks, and the embodiment of knowledge in technological artifacts. Therefore, the Academy will bring together faculty and students from various branches of the humanities and social sciences to think about how »mediality« permeates these disciplines in distinct ways; we will approach these issues not only from a robustly interdisciplinary vantage but also by way of comparative cultural and historical perspectives. In this way, the Academy will contribute to our understanding of the fundamental ways that forms of media and technological mediation inform disciplinary knowledge across the humanities, as well as the ways that these disciplinary knowledge formations are an essential precondition to any serious thinking about mediality.